

They Showed Me Their Instruments of Recording



photo: Fernando Natalici

The Art of Copernicus in Five Acts by Mark S. Tucker (April 2006)

Act 1 - DRAGGING THE ID INTO THE LIGHT: Copernicus as a Diagnostic on Evolution

No matter how whacked-out a performer may seem, the difference between the fact and the masque is always knowable. When Jim Morrison crossed Baudelaire with whiffs of Ubu Roi, it was obvious he was a carefully plotted Bacchanalian, not a creature of divine madness. That is to say, the leather-clad tousle-maned player possessed his art, it did not possess him. 'Twas a means to an end, not the end itself; hence, despite tremendous powers as a singer, his lasting fame may well rest on his mysteriously pantherine poetry, not the rough and tumble of his singing. Too much was reliant there upon the depths of gargantuanly bottomless cups, whence the hyper-phallic minstrel plummeted to the bottom of a raging ego. The result wasn't pretty, as bootleg recordings with him, Johnny Winter, and Jimi Hendrix clearly show; hence, it takes no giant intellect to understand that the largest part of Morrison's myth is purest bullshit. Even he would agree, could he but.

From that same period, the Living Theater, a strange and brilliantly confrontational '60s/'70s art troupe which forced audiences to reconsider their safe expectations, also reached only just so high, not content to settle for the low-hanging fruit but curiously indisposed to clambering the most perilous branches, to where a mercilessly blazing orb shone nakedly in risky cosmic splendor. In any society, only every once in a rare while do we get the opportunity to stumble across an artist immolating himself in the service of Art, incising broiling cranial sutures to lay open the lid of creativity, spilling forth sizzling chaos and neural wormholes. Steven Berkoff's hideously brilliant staging of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Peter Greenaway's stunning *Prospero's Books* are two examples in a rather barren registry aching for a companionship almost impossible of proximity.

In 1984, Joseph Smalkowski assumed the name of a long-dead rebel scientist who had run the disfavor of an ecclesiastical Establishment, the Roman Catholic Church, and flown headlong into a fracas with consensus reality. Like that *anciens venerable*, Smalkowski conducted himself in certain ways in order to transcend the madness of the herd and pierce an implacable smog long laying 'twixt man and the heavens. Lineage nailed down, nameplate in place, the New York fractal raconteur issued his debut, *Nothing Exists*, whose cover betrayed a small indication of what the consumer might expect: a B&W snap of a tall bespectacled hippie grasping a mike, leaning forward to have a coffin nail lit by an audient. Behind him ranged several instrumentalists providing the matrix for what was soon discovered to be, as needle hit groove, coherent madness in leoninely elegant tones.

'Progressive rant' might be the best pigeon-hole for Copernicus' work. While the album emerged in that auspiciously infamous year, Smalkowski had, since 1978, been gigging with Pierce Turner, a man to become best known for an abortive mainstream musical "career" based upon a small association with Philip Glass, from which three LP's went straight into the remainder racks. The Copernicus ensemble was also far from a Billboard entry, favoring capricious exercises in controlled anarchy. Up to 20 musicians at a time sat in for the seemingly mad gentleman's concerts and recording sessions, producing spontaneous bursts over which Smalkowski would, most often equally extemporaneously, create poetry, tirades, and word-theater. The attraction of bohemians to such presentation is obvious: it occupied the far end of free-associational jamming, freaking out in loose song contexts. This independence resulted in free-for-alls, followed and guided by whatever the singer might begin pouring forth amidst the cacaphony and occasional euphony.

In this LP, though, "Quasimodo" is perhaps the best example of how the somewhat dangerous action could yield unexpectedly conformist paydirt. Larry Kirwan decided to base the composition in a stun-guitar ostinato while Turner plays organ behind, shifting from sunny skies and cascades to schizophrenic side tangents. Copernicus erupts in stream-of-consciousness *sprechstimme* neoprosody that up-ends the song's mood, language base, coherence, and personality. For him, that means going to ever greater degrees of outburst: from sinister to depressed to enraged. The cut's unusually mainstream for such a boiling aggregate, but that's not to say any established radio station would've even vaguely considered spinning the baffling one-off. Obscenity would be the least part of its worries, lunacy the largest, yet such is precisely what gained Copernicus the small but loyal audience he managed to begin to build.

"Let Me Rest" is more apposite to the bulk of the catalogue. Raging, sobbing, extolling, blubbering, spitting out fury, Smalkowski issues pronunciamenta and dicta in the blank verse that made Morrison's "Horse Latitudes" such a singularity, necessity and expression demanding the lines proceed thus and so. Flanking, the band scored everything telepathically, completely sympathetic to each shifting

notion. A long association with the far side of sanity obviously provided the cues, as not a measure is misplaced, no matter how weirdly each bar mutates. "Nagasaki" shows the Pere Ubu (the Akron boys, not the literary character) penchant such groups seem to unavoidably acquire, blending fragments of endless genres into a whole, speaking as ersatz-culturally as the, um, "libretto." Here, the music takes over and Copernicus is content to shout and stomp secondarily, crazed by the din of crashing instruments, eventually emerging in the foreground to stamp-press the meeting to a close, imprecations inching towards nullity, his favorite theme.

Smalkowski, perhaps unknown to himself but probably not, was acting out a particularly nasty *kensho*, an awakening suffered via a profound shock while discovering, as so many of us did, the Roman Catholic Church was full of excreta up to its eyeballs. He never, though, abandoned the proto-Jesuitical quest for truth in either contemplation or experience, albeit while keeping to it in a fashion Crowley and LaVey, to look to the far side of the equation, would have commented admirably upon. This meant that his post-Christian consciousness would have to consider zen-like immersions in far more radical truths, the better to keep any imprint of coherence, no matter how abstracted. Thus, "Atomic Nevermore" states not only that reality is based in the atomic and sub-atomic worlds but also that humanity will never find its peace in illusions fabricated above those levels. In fact, a march into the "atomic unknown" would be the only path to serenity and understanding. Here also is the clearest example of his continually (Richard) Burtonian delivery, a vehicle proving irresistible to those enamored of feverish and superlatively inflected oratory. In many ways, Copernicus became Hamlet finally gone completely 'round the cornerpost, holding thinly to tattered reality whilst supernal images and blazing electrons wreathed his sweat-drenched and dazedly astonished brow, dead kings parading before him from time unknown.

Victim of the Sky (1986), then, became unexpectedly surprising when it commenced with a highly abstract folk song, "Wanderer," which the band grinningly turned quasi-saccharine, followed by the nightclub-jazzy title cut, complete with a seductive sax not from any ilk John Klemmer ever had in mind. The whole schmeer changes as "Black from White" ushers meteorically hot anguish to the front, almost as quickly retreating into its lyrics. "Not Him Again" descends into Machine Purgatory, hallucinogenic with viruses, while a cold steel background freezes gasping music quotes into claustrophobically small boxes. Larry Kirwan's "Desperate," a reggae paean, translates appropriately for its almost nerdily histrionic delivery, over which the maester rants with zero-point doctrine.

Not only is "From Bacteria" one of Copernicus' golden rants, bellowing and raw, harking back to a previously unrecognized Age of Microscopy, before humans or even dinosaurs began fouling the nest, it leads straight into one of his most cherished pieces, "The Lament of Joe Apples," a drunken Bukowskopian narrative by a fictional frothing bullman running his ego against the leash. Behind gravelly alleytrash, strange musical pastiches caper and prance in faded counter-narrative, glancing in and out of the auditory field. The most amazing element is not the pristine bizarreness of the cut but its complete moment-to-moment spontaneity, with not the slightest nanosecond of hesitation or contemplation, a demonstration of how an individual in the throes of insane inspiration can come up with the ego's script on humanity, crafting a dead-on psycho-medical portrait of grossly deranged alcohol brainworks skewing the sentient hunk of meat protagonizing beneath it.

Deeper (1987) found the singer as paranoiac and pissed as ever, wallowing in more Bedlamite personalities. The obsessive "Oh God!," consisting of just that single interjection repeated over and over, more berserkly each time, flows into "Son of a Bitch from the North," with its deadly Chill Faction (guitarist Kirwan's sub-group) music, a smorgasbord in Hell. Still based in Turner and companions, Copernicus adopted a gaggle of new personnel from the street, provoking a scintillating effort. As before, the preponderance of material is of-the-moment, but a healthy percentage is also prepared. Hardly matters, everything fits seamlessly. The atmosphere, as before, becomes thick and hot; with Smalkowski, there will be no chill-out, no rest... or will there?

He favors giving the world back what it gives him, and if the globe grants a moment's respite, as in "Disco Days are Over," then he too takes a ragged lungful. If however, you might imagine he'd temporarily stay rooted, yer nuts. What commences as introspection ends with lament, fangs, furrowed brow and finally, only momentarily, exhausted acceptance, then it's back into the firepit. This slice is Copernicus' most intense and elegant statement - brilliant in several ways, but mostly for fearless high dives flown from parapets, not to mention Freudian perversions. Oh, and Joe Apples meets his Maker on side two, a short hard life brought to an inglorious end via hospital sickbeds. By the time the disc is over, it's more than obvious Copernicus is imperishably unique, with no competition, now or ever. He's one of a kind and it took only two LP's to manifest the fact. Trying this sort of high-wire act, most would die of flopsweat, withering into inconfidence; Smalkowski merely draws in another ocean of air, juts his face into the muck of life, and begins anew.

Null (1990) featured his most highly rendered piece, "The Sound of the Mind," a Disneyland ride gone Stygian, lurking to burrow inside spectator synapses and do obscene things. It also contains "The Authorities," a pointed bird-flip to anti-anarchistic forces. The release isn't quite up to the powers of *Deeper* but still distinctly Copernican, full of unexpected left turns and unhinging viewpoints. The vocalist-composer is as confident as the moment he took up the task, born to it. "Touch" is an anguished paean to pitiful human ignorance, soon stomping around in gritty detritus, flying into subject matter ills, simultaneously occupying positive and negative forces in split flesh. The pianist-accompanist is his wife of 25 years, Marcella, and that knowledge is weirdly touching: the soulmate of this deeply fragmented artist sitting in the center of her mate's rational dementia, providing a subtly carnied Chopin as soundtrack. The idea warms the heart at the exact same moment it sends gooseflesh scurrying along the spine. At 16 minutes, the cut has a chance to clatter up and down the emotional tone scale more than once, the ensemble jumping behind the keyboardist through most of the span.

All that accomplished, it would now be a few years before *No Borderline* (1993) showed its face but the wait was worth it. "Joe Meets Copernicus" became the next step in his "Sound of the Mind" mode. Smalkowski seemed to be trying his hand at a bizarre form of audio book, showing what the damn things *should* be like, what the form is capable of if an artist would only have the chutzpah to quit recreating the box the art came in. The piece became a defining marriage of music, words, and emotion, continuously carried for the span of the opening triumvirate, all the way to the close of "The Voice," newly supported by a fabulous family band (the Nandayapas) showcasing, of all things, killer marimba. Copernicus, altering his personum to flesh the array, chameleons several characters, bending the narrative back into vastly more fantastic caverns.

The rest of the CD treads back to the past while retaining new levels. The full menu of musicians hails from various world locations, brought in as the singer performed solo in numerous cities, adjourning to recruit their company in the studio after live gigs. Turner also sits in, but this would be his last session with the man he'd aided for so long. The reason for the split isn't mentioned anywhere, neither on Turner's nor Copernicus' site, nor in outside literature, so we'll momentarily assume that the long partnership had come to an end, dying a natural death. "No Borderline," meanwhile, returned the disc to its beginnings in a *Word Jazz/Stay Awake* vein.

By this time, the artist had finally received a modicum of what was due him. Moving from small spaces, he gave a string of 10 solo performances over two weeks at the Judith Anderson Theater in NYC, followed by the release of a compilation in Korea, each selection

decided by the faraway audience. Next came a tour with dates in Czechoslovakia, Austria, and especially Germany, with, finally, a unique small honor: a request to perform at the SXSW music conference in Texas, in 1993.

Though he personally might have been achieving some degree of artistic recognition, Copernicus' work was yet confined to a very small audience, one possessing refined sensibilities and open minds, not the easiest beings to locate and gather in any form, let alone try to make a living from. Hence, eight long years would pass before his (so far) penultimate issuance would see the light of day: *Immediate Eternity* (2001), with the consistently best ensemble yet to backdrop him, the Ecuadorian impromptu The Nomadas, boasting the burning, high-flying, acidic guitar of Cesar Aragundi. This type of whole-cloth alliance had a cousin over in Terence McKenna's work with Spacetime Continuum. Though McKenna was miles away from Copernicus' enunciative powers, the two were inextricably bathed in high exotica and an ambition to awaken their peculiar audiences. McKenna, a psychoethnobotanist, had previously issued the mind-blowing *Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge*, a protracted dissertation on the severance of man's mental well-being from the plant kingdom, especially the psychotropics, a seminar that had prompted the space-rock group to later team with him. Listening to the bizarre but provable data, a workaday slob would think McKenna was Copernicus' cousin, so closely aligned are the radical materials of each.

By now, Copernicus' lyrics had grown intensely philosophical, to the exclusion of all else. Every song was riveted upon the human plight and its stultifyingly destructive preoccupation with dwelling in illusion, as against the greater joys of accepting atomic reality. In a number of ways, Smalkowski had become a more comprehensible Nisargadatta Maharaj, another in a line of dwellers on the periphery of reality who spoke of matters well beyond understanding and precise verbalization. Copernicus' particular center of gravity was unshakably the atom but his ideations became little different from Zen, Taoism, Ch'an, etc.. As may be expected, the provocateur shouts, pontificates, trembles, wonders, contemplates... and, shock of shocks!, even *sings*, briefly during "Dust," something no one had expected. The band cooks and Aragundi takes every chance he's given to phase into higher energies. The liner asserts Smalkowski was sitting amongst some of the finest players Ecuador had to offer and there's little reason to doubt it.

Act 2 - IDIOTS IN THE BUSH:

Copernicus and the Twilight of Music Criticism

That disc was also Copernicus' gentlest. Despite Aragundi stoking up to a white-hot state, the whole is nothing like the singer's first few releases. Part of this even the orator attributes to the discovery of an overactive thyroid and subsequent prescribing of medication. However, his new "pacified" existence hasn't robbed him of an iota of personal genius. *Immediate Eternity* is easier for everyone to listen to but no less entertaining, striking, or artful... though not every ear will be appreciative. On a web-site devoted to some kind of mealy-mouthed Wiccan mish-mosh, the tritely pseudonymed 'Alan Cabal' makes an observation that "Copernicus [is] second only perhaps to G.G. Allin on the obnoxious meter." This ersatz Puritanical critic had apparently caught Copernicus at a NYC performance, then posited the ridiculous appraisal, just a molecule shy of complete assholery. Smalkowski and G.G. Allin in the same breath? Good Christ. Art, the adage tightly avers, must ever suffer fools and this one seemed to have taken a wrong turn while bushwhacking for Yanni recitals.

But first, Jackson Griffith, incestuous soul brother to Alan Cabal, and another no-name job with grade school writing proficiency, provides a *Web* take on *Immediate Eternity* thusly: "Fans of such outsider-music landmarks as William Shatner's *The Transformed Man* should take immense delight in *Immediate Eternity*, a collaboration between a buffoon named after a 15th/16th-century Polish astronomer and a band from Guayaquil, Ecuador. But lest you think that this might be some insane guy bellowing theatrical gibberish over accompaniment from one of those Andean panpipe bands you occasionally see parhandling in shopping malls, it is not. No, *Immediate Eternity* sounds like some insane guy bellowing theatrical gibberish over feverish progressive-rock wanking. Which is to say that listening to this CD is like putting Scotch tape on a cat's paws before draping a banana peel across its back: If you're the cat, you're frightened that some idiot is torturing you; if you're the idiot, you're laughing at the hapless cat. To hear Copernicus is to experience both sides, and to understand."

Marvelous. As if the near-total of prog crits weren't already a malodorous gaggle of obese, bleating, yuckapuck trekkie squawkboxes, the condition now had to be sanctified in this moron. Despite spindly-shanked assurances to the contrary, alternate-culture mags ever aped MTV. Vulgarly unpatroned individuals became unworthy of coverage in such an alt-capitalistically sophomoric universe and *OPTion*, at best the breeding ground for writer-critic-musician wannabes, ran, in their March/April issue 1990, an article that summed up everything about the declining coverage of the musical arts in general and that miserably rag and its confreres in particular. Art was not envisioned, merely capital. Thus, in an issue that quietly posited Glenn Branca, Stephen Micus, and Copernicus as attractants, what greeted the eyes photographically? Kate Bush. Indie queen, hm? Yeah, right.

But that, friends, was just the beginning. The article on Copernicus was in reality no such thing at all, being instead a self-paeon to a jerk whom Smalkowski had chosen to play bass in his Russo-Euro tour, a punker suffering from delusions of adequacy, David Conrad. *OPTion* abetted what became an assassination, readily displayed in the intro paragraph, wherein the scribbler lauds himself as bassist for "Copernicus, a 50-year-old poet/performance artist who calls himself a 'musical genius'." From there, it's all downhill. The bassist rags mercilessly on Copernicus, calling him "a frightening sight," "a Polish gargoyle" wearing "polyester shirts that look like Liberace's shower curtains," "a cross between a mad rhino and a participant in a Haitian voodoo ceremony," and so on. Following each trashing, the writer immediately inserts his beatific presence in an ensemble he claims "improvises Sun Ra-style art/funk."

The article abuts a snapshot of Copernicus and the band. Oh, did I say 'Copernicus'? My mistake. Although *OP*'s cover distinctly heralded him, and the sub-title to this 7-page bilge likewise noted the gent, in the photo Smalkowski is barely distinguishable. Instead, his five treacherous flunkies are featured, metro-hayseeds standing in a field, smiling their mugshots - one even, fChrissakes, sporting a Batman cap. You know what you're in for, don't you? That's right: a cornucopia of ego. Copernicus is rarely mentioned; rather, we're mistreated to masturbatorily heroic passages detailing the privations suffered by yokel Conrad as he treads lands that are (gasp!) not American! The scribe pens himself as unable to avoid being dogged by swooning females every step of the way - cow-eyed, ditz, Russkie Goth chix who apparently can't control their estrogen in the presence of a four-string, one-trick, Yankee Self-Doodler.

See the next section of the [Copernicus article](#)

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They Showed Me Their Instruments of Recording



photo: Fernando Natalici

The Art of Copernicus in Five Acts by Mark S. Tucker, continued

Conrad appeared on two Copernicus LPs, *Deeper* and *Null*, after which, as stated in *No Borderline's* notes, Smalkowski decided to go stage-solo. The abovementioned tour is cited by Copernicus in the lattermost CD, but in this way: he says the musicians had become ill at some point, and he found the solo gig put him into a greater degree of intimacy with the audience. If we were to read into that, we might find that 'ill' meant "mentally ill" and that he was tired of working with flaming bungholes. Despite Conrad's many vilifications, which were by this time well known, having been in print for three years, Copernicus yet acted the gentleman. Who, then, may we suppose was full of shit and who innocent of charges? At any rate, while many other long-time musicians appeared on *No Borderline*, Conrad was conspicuously absent.

Someone who does appear, though, is stalwart Larry Kirwan, the guitarist. Kirwan's mildly interesting, playing a decent guitar and serving as the nucleus of several groups existing above and beyond his tenancy in Copernicus' band, side efforts that, while stone unknown on the Pac Coast, apparently had some degree of fame in New York and the tri-state area - either that or it's yet another case of self-aggrandizement to cover for a deeply detested embarrassing obscurity, a fashion currently all the rage and exemplified nauseatingly on the West Coast by fellow ex-hippie/glamtwist/punker Johnny Carbone-Angel-Wendell, a cut-rate L.A. scribe and talk show host, glaringly Kirwan's soul brother. Kirwan penned a semi-fictional account entitled *Green Suede Shoes - An Irish-American Odyssey*, pawning his heritage for whatever diversity-gold it might cadge while purporting to preserve the NY punk scene, um, novelistically.

In it, he mentions Copernicus at odd moments but what might Kirwan's life-gig have been? Well, to read about punk is akin to excavating a leper's feet for toe jam so the adventure hasn't been taken by anyone I know; if you, too, are spectacularly uninterested, you're not alone. The potential demerits of literary efforts can as easily be seen in statistics as in hazarding a perusal of said magnum jokus. The Amazon page for this brick is trying hard to move the damn thing, slashing the list price 30%. Why then is it not selling? Well, another almost unnoticed fact is the real cause for dread: *Green Suede* is one of the biggest returners available. Most tomes on Amazon also have one, or perhaps several, *used* copies for sale - Kirwan's boasts nearly 50! As was opined of Peter Frampton's *Comes Alive* LP: the damn thing shipped gold and returned platinum. Ouch! But that's not all. Kirwan emitted a predecessor novel, *Liverpool Fantasy*, as well. That one's selling for \$1.84, against a list of \$15. I'm searching my thesaurus for a synonym to 'ignominious.'

To run an article purporting to chronicle Copernicus' trek but out of seven Freudian pages, end up with about four column inches on the guy, the writer monkeywrenching everything, was the height of inane editorial discretion, saved only by the fact that the tampon published across town, David Ciaffardini's *Sound Choice*, was even worse. Conrad's article wasn't as much as cursorily checked, just run as-is. Pathetic.

If you, in that period, knew nothing of the bizarrely brilliant Copernicus, look to the above for the explanation, then travel across the hall and flip the radio DJs the bird. While Smalkowski was prized for years on the indie air circuit, receiving quite decent rotation on college stations, the moment trends shifted, the disc spinners dropped him like yesterday's cod, moving on to follow lures Warner Bros. was setting for all and sundry, hunting in the grounds where artists formerly shrieked about how much it loathed exactly what it now stripped and undulated for.

Fortunately, though, while twits like Conrad eventually found their rightful place busting suds at Barney's Beanery, Copernicus yet prowled the shadowy fringes, surprising followers with a new disc this very year (2005).

Act 3: GUTENBERG'S GHOST:

Copernicus as Author

A new disc? Yes and no. *Immediate Eternity* had been a flawed gem, owing to engineering problems and *It* was the resolution. However, let's backtrack a bit and uncover why this unique feat of reissuing a previous LP in a new take - something never done before - was so vital to the artist. Four years earlier, he'd produced a book on his philosophy of nullity and atomic reality, *Immediate Eternity*, after which the CD had been titled, a strangely engaging tome falling somewhere between science, autobiography, rant, and the oddly captivating writings of an earlier mentioned religious commentator: Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Though Copernicus is no one's disciple, his viewpoint's abundantly Zen, slanted somewhat in a vein with modern Buddhists Ken Wilber

Though Copernicus is no one's acolyte, his viewpoints abundantly Zen-started somewhat in a vein with modern Buddhists Ken Wilber and Philip Kapleau, authors trying to relate the higher stratosphere of consciousness in comprehensible terms, unlike Maharaj, who fascinates through obliquity. Copernicus though is convinced that only the atom holds truth and that "the way humanity has viewed itself for its entire history has been *in error*". In this, he includes Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and others as missing the point, with Democritus and perhaps a few others only accidentally stumbling into terra correcta.

Blasphemous? Not really, certainly no more so than any other intelligent mind that has posed solutions to the insoluble. After all, both the Christ and the Buddha were blasphemers in their day. Relating science as the proof of his ponderings, especially the Big Bang, Copernicus brings everything together many times, perhaps no better than in this passage:

"Only the discovery of the never indivisible changing subatomic particle can bring us an absolute authority. God could actually be the smallest nondivisible subatomic particle. This particle possesses infinite self-energy and it exists since it never changes, if such a phenomenon is possible. This particle has always existed throughout the entire Universe. It is the basic particle of which everything in the Universe is composed. Without that particle, we are condemned to chaotic relativity (we would be condemned to chaotic relativity, because in a world of constant change with particles moving at the speed of light, there would be nothing on which to hold or build. Nothing could exist)."

And it is precisely his point that nothing indeed exists, for that very fact. Before the incautious reader attempts to posit Luddite mentality, citing the seeming gaffe of predicating reality against an absence of change... that's exactly what the zennists and others have long pointed to and what science itself is bafflingly coming to the discovery of. Zen graphically represents reality as a circle with nothing in it - or, more to the point, with *everything* in it yet ultimately devoid of individually distinguishing characteristics. It's not that reality is a void but that it's void of any scrap of identity, with which Copernicus agrees.

Physically, his theory fits. The Big Bang occurred because of an incomprehensible compaction, after which the explosion was an orgy of creation. The point's hard to miss: this center directing the compaction of itself was the God particle and the explosion was just, as all religion cites, pure Creation. But wait a minute!, you may say, that's not the way it goes! Oh really? Well, how less figurative is this argument than one filled with talking snakes, seminal Edenic parents having only two sons who somehow find wives somewhere, hairy bearded thunderers more intensely venal than the most quintessentially pitiful humans, and the whole panoply of sick musings we call Christianity? Or, on the other side of the tally, how less credible is that than a set of Eastern idylls espousing an inability to speak at all upon the subject in concrete terms while asserting that the new set of perceptual barriers they're bouncing their collective shaven psychic head against is the Alpha and Omega? You begin to see the problem.

The author has gone the route of all seekers, searching for what so few are able to put into such honestly Mertonian terms:

"I came one day to a dusty cantina and remembered and didn't know if I was doing right or wrong, but only knew that after I was tired and mind weary that perhaps I would be punished for my compulsive search to be joined in the ultimate moment that some miraculous event could take place, even as the brain and body were being assaulted, somehow the spirit would be set free in some wild and desperate gamble into somewhere."

For him, that event occurred; thus, he now reflected the sentiments of the avatars when claiming that "[n]o human can truthfully stop and say 'I am here!'" The Dalai Lama has spoken concerning this, showing how science has illustrated that we cannot determine where in space we are located, nor in what part of the body, if any, resides our essential I-ness. He, however, goes a little further than Copernicus, saying that the ancient scriptures are correct and all that exists are waves of light, even beneath the atom. Does this conflict with Copernicus' assertions? No. After all, Tenzin Gyatso would have to field the question "What's light made up of, then?" The answer, obvious from both he and Copernicus, is that existence seems to be a riddle of boxes within boxes within boxes within boxes within...

Copernicus calls what is otherwise seen as dualism "MAGOVA" and 'Illusiona.' The biggest difference between the two, the main impediment that keeps any from seeing reality, is a rootedness in identity; therefore Illusiona is that aberration while MAGOVA is the true perception that identity does not exist and that "there is BEING which is the nonstop spontaneous atomic expression through conscious and unconscious action." Though Copernicus does not say so, this steps directly into one of the more frightening zen revelations: the claim that reality is recreated newly and completely thousands of times per second and that's what we see as motion and change. This action is, in our perceptions, like the still frames of a movie, run together to provide the illusion of a motion that's not really there, just a deception of the senses.

A chilling thought, completely non-human, yet Copernicus arrived at it just as the elder gurus had, agreeing in different terms, not in the least put off that the concord may not be seen. How could he be? It's *reality*. But the rest of us balk at such a bizarre notion. We don't like to entertain the concept that everything our lives are composed of is an inconceivably complicated succession of stills casting a weird glamour. Yet, if one checks into current string theory, the fractal sciences, and dimension research, one begins to see the welcome mat for the same thinking. In fact, there exists in science an adage that the composition of any event is affected by its perceiver, whether the perceiver is revealed or not. By these lights, how unusual are Copernicus' musings and revelations? In truth, not as much as they may at first seem, and that's what moves the open and inquiring mind, even the skeptic's, to come to be struck by his book. It's not for the squeamish or the lovers of dogma, but can't help but strike resonant chords otherwise.

Act 4 - DENOUEMENT?:

A Unique CD and...

Back to the new CD. *Immediate Eternity II* is, as said, a re-take on the disc from 2001 which shares the book's title. To my knowledge, other than live presentations - as in the Who's thankfully perpetual re-presentations of *Tommy* (all, goddammit, lacking the nonpareil "Underture") - no one has dared a studio do-over of work already in the market, yet *Eternity 2* is quite justifiable. The earlier disc showed Copernicus more relaxed than had ever been the case, no longer 100% perpetually engaged in fevered jeremiads, eschewing the dramas revolving around notorious fictional back-alley characters, instead inserting paeans to Man and the war between MAGOVA and Illusiona. Unfortunately, it had been preserved less than perfectly, containing distortion, mud, and other elemental flaws. This irked the artist and, understanding it to be a zenith statement, things needed to change.

In that freshly performed re-take, admirers can not only wallow in the contrasts between old and new but indulge every sonic omnivore's fetish for variations on themes. Much like such gems as King Crimson's *Great Deceiver* set which bestowed multiple documentations on

reach for variations on themes: much like each genre do King Crimson's Great Deceiver set, which bestowed multiple documentations on each of many songs, *Immediate Eternity II* yields new renditions of the previous CD. Once more, the guitar pyrotechnics of Cesar Aragundi can be enjoyed, ably abetted by the loungily delectable piano colorations of Newton Velasquez, with bassist and drummer providing rhythmic baselines.

From the very first, Copernicus was never a singer but an orator, as finely honed and spookily affecting as the best any voice-talent house has ever come up with, a *sprechstimme wundermensch*. In this, especially when reviewing past pleasures, one is struck that when Hal Willner was creating his very dark Disney tribute *Stay Awake*, he never stumbled upon this guy, who easily outmatches the best of that select crew, save perhaps only for Tom Waits. Copernicus is the logically warped flipside successor to Ken Nordine (who was on *Awake*), not for bongo-beating hipsters but rather world-weary pissed-off Bedlamites. Once again, "The Stick" begins in a return of the Copernicus of yore, roaring out in Tiresian fashion, ceaselessly adumbrating outrages against Nature but collapsing into mellifluidity, toning down the incandescent fury, ushering compassion and broadheartedness in. This is the essence of the new Copernicus.

Is it the last CD? It doesn't feel like it. He seems to have insisted on this event in order to reconstruct the stage for the next, to more elegantly reflect on man's baffling place in the universe, melding elder confrontationalities with profound respect and sympathy for those forced to dwell in ignorance.

But let's also skew a look to the side for a moment, re-hooking the Willner reference. One can't help but wonder what Copernicus' marvelous voice and inflectional abilities might lend to the previously mentioned audio-book world. Those who relish such things lick their lips at the possibility that some clever producer might possibly understand the unheard-of depths Copernicus could endow Poe or similar writers with. Commercial? Yes, but ungodly attractive to we who hope against hope for one mode of art being reflected well in another.

Until that and other unlikely events, though, the music connoisseur can only speculate that the four year gap between *Immediate* and this moment was just another long pause preceding a newer and stranger work. Art, in the day of Toilet-Seat DaDa Galleries, narrows with dimaying speed and we could use more true creatives.

ACT 5 - NEW WORDS:

The Interview

Preparing for an interview with Copernicus is a bit unsettling. How does one go about a colloquy with a gentleman dismantling not only tradition but also taxonomy? Having read his book - a very pleasurable and mentally stimulating event despite its difficulties - the prospect of hitting the rounds of epistemology, phenomenology, and other realms of profoundly abstract metaphysics was a trifle daunting. Here, I've tried to stay decently within bounds that will not elude anyone curious enough to peruse the colloquy; if, however, parts of the conversation puncture that barrier, I can make no apology - to a degree, it was done purposely, to draw the reader out of consensus reality and expose him to what proceeds well beyond Kierkegaardian either/or double-binds. It may at moments get a bit thick, but it beats the pants off listening to some hair farmer extol his latest corporate sponsorship alongside fevered news of groupies pressing urgently for erotic attentions - as salaciously interesting as the latter may be - no?

Half the questions below addressed music and art, the remainder delved into Copernicus' philosophy of atomic nullity. The latter chases a very esoteric line of inquiry, yet arises properly from attentiveness to the content of his lyrics and what may have promoted their creation, elements in music not often addressed, modernly or otherwise, despite the manifold excellences of Keith Reid, Peter Sinfield, Richard Palmer-James, Jon Anderson, and many others.

It should be noted that I always write the overviews (above) before conducting the interviews. Thus, certain interesting disparities are explained.

PART ONE: ART

PSF: The bespectacled hippie on the cover of *Nothing Exists* was in complete contrast to the elegant gentleman shown on *Deeper*. What did the average audience see in early Copernicus performances and what do they see now?

COPERNICUS: The bespectacled hippie on the cover of *Nothing Exists* was actually, in the photo, performing for hippies, drug addicts, and muggers in a park on 8th street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. These people were high, wild, and threatening, so I had to show I was wilder and meaner than they were. There were some standing at the foot of the stage with sticks. I think they softened up to me not only because I was wilder than they but also because I drew them into the pieces.

The elegant gentleman shown on *Deeper* was about five years later with a new evolution in the Copernicus concert where Copernicus actually left the stage briefly and changed clothing. Each concert had a possible six or seven clothing change. I am not sure what piece I was doing, but normally the only piece I did sitting at a table was "The Lament of Joe Apples." Normally, Joe Apples is done with worker's clothing, but I believe that, in this case, I made an exception. Everybody, no matter what class or social level they live on, bitches about his wife, his boss, and the frustrations of his life while he teaches his son in his own way.

The major difference in the two Copernicuses is that the first Copernicus never rehearsed. The music and words were made up spontaneously on-stage, maybe in a ten-minute conversation with the musicians before the show. We didn't even have an album when that concert was given. On the other hand, with the *Deeper* photo, there were already two albums released and the people always wanted to hear "Joe Apples." There were recorded pieces that we could draw upon. Like all artists, the earlier Copernicus was wilder, more spontaneous, and even more interesting on stage due to the greater extent of improvisation. Improvisation that works is the best thing in the world; improvisation that does not work is the death. It is much riskier to improvise on stage. A great deal of the old Copernicus stepped back when we did the tour of Eastern Europe, repeating the same concert in every city. We all missed the good old days of just being free and having fun.

PSF: Your live work has frightened timid souls, even amongst us critics, who already can count far too many fundamentalistic morons in our number. How much did reactive behaviors from the audience figure into your live expositions? Were, for instance, drunks pissed at the pugacity of such confrontational presentations? Might conservatives have been alarmed at the anarchy? Did you field verbal or

the pugnacity of such confrontational presentations? Might conservatives have been alarmed at the anarchy? Did you field verbal or physical flak from socialites finding that feasting with panthers wasn't quite what they'd imagined?

COPERNICUS: The job of an entertainer is to take the feelings of the audience into consideration and generally make them feel good. The job of a serious artist is not to take the audience into consideration and just express himself or herself as if he or she were in a room all by themselves. The true artist expressing himself in front of an audience allows the audience to view this process. Once the artist crosses the line and starts to worry about the feelings of the audience, he is an artist who has become an entertainer. Copernicus has always tried to maintain the level of pure art with no consideration for the audience. Pierce Turner, in fact, once said that the performance of Copernicus was an attack on the audience. Copernicus has inspired and has attacked. Whatever it is.

PSF: How did you come to the attentions of the Judith Anderson Theater and SXSW?

COPERNICUS: The Judith Anderson Theater was just a theater on 42nd St. in Manhattan that I rented, doing my solo show for two weeks. As for SWSW, I met the founder in Berlin, and he invited me to do a solo show at the conference. I believe I performed there on two separate occasions.

PSF: How difficult was it finding musicians for your work?

COPERNICUS: It has never been difficult to find musicians. If I feel that there's a good vibration, we go into the studio. Musicians love to perform with Copernicus, because they get to be free in a world of total freedom; they generally have experiences that they never had before. They also grow as a result of one recording session. Black 47 was composed originally, and even today mostly, of ex-Copernicus musicians; in my opinion, they are still playing the music that I taught them to play. I showed them how to be free, how to improvise in freedom, and how to be good at it.

PSF: What happened between you and Pierce Turner?

COPERNICUS: Pierce Turner has always been referred to as the Father of Copernicus' music and Larry Kirwan, now head of Black 47, is considered to be the mother of Copernicus' music. Nothing bad has ever happened between Pierce Turner and Copernicus. Pierce has his own career that he is interested in. He spends a lot of time in Ireland but also plays in New York City. If I called him today, he would love to play with Copernicus and I would love to have him. He has been a source of inspiration to Copernicus even until today. I call him "Pop."

PSF: Your writing process was at first either spontaneous or scripted - more the former than the latter - yet, had you not noted which was which, it's doubtful the listener could ever have known. Did you perform that way as a deliberate stream-of-consciousness effort or is that just the nature of your art and preference?

COPERNICUS: My faith in the stream of consciousness has always been high and, to this moment, stays high. New ideas and emotions for me come through spontaneity. When I got to a point where the stream of consciousness was weak, I had to rest. Stream of consciousness is like a well: if you take a lot of water from the well, it can run dry. It needs to replenish itself. I got to that point where all I had in me was a repetition of old material. That's why I spent three years writing that book, in which I was forced to dig deeper and, in digging deeper, beautiful, wonderful, new thoughts spontaneously came out, which I included. I'm about to start recording spontaneously again, because I believe the well is full once more. I have some of these thoughts hanging on a wall here: "Identity separates the mind from God," "Life is the same as non-life," "Humanity is an illusion created by its own nonexistent imagination," and "Infinite self energy". Stuff like this does not easily come from the top of your head.

See the final section of the [Copernicus article](#)

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They Showed Me Their Instruments of Recording



photo: Fernando Natalici

The Art of Copernicus in Five Acts by Mark S. Tucker, continued

PSF: Your wife appeared, as far as I can discern, only once on your releases. Why not more frequently?

COPERNICUS: My wife was playing Chopin in the house and I loved it. Music inspires me to feel, and she plays with a great deal of emotion. I invited her spontaneously to a small recording session that I was having. She accepted. We sat her down at a wonderful piano in the studio. At some point, she began to play while the other musicians were playing and I was emoting. Then we mixed it all together like an abstract painting in sound. I love the piece. Right now, the name of it does not come to my mind - it's like loving one of your children but forgetting the child's name. For whatever reason, my wife has not returned to record. I'm pretty wild in a recording session and it's sort of intimidating to have your wife watching you. After one of my recording sessions, she might ask me for a divorce, with the defense that Copernicus was not the man that she married! Forty years have gone by and she is still the best defender of Copernicus around, even though she does not agree with even the foundations of Copernicus. She hasn't even read the book, which has been translated and published in Spanish. My wife is from Mexico. Ah! The name of the piece is "Come to it," from the album *Null*.

PSF: The last two CD's, echoes of each other, disclose a distinctly more arrested approach in many respects while not losing the passion of the earlier works. Are you mellowing, Copernicus, as age creeps up on the children of the '60's and '70's?

COPERNICUS: I am not mellowing. I am coming to the conclusion that if you really want to communicate something to someone, you should not be yelling at them. My father was always yelling and I never paid any attention to what he said. I want to communicate, not express my ego through yelling.

PSF: "The Sound of the Mind" was your most highly produced song and a scintillating piece of voice theater. Ever given thought to an audio-book effort done completely in just such a manner, either of your own words or as a take on, for instance, Poe or Kafka?

COPERNICUS: "The Sound of the Mind" was produced by Michael Theodore. He would bring me into the studio and I would do bare vocals. The words to "The Sound of the Mind" flowed out right off the top of my head. Theodore would take the vocals and put the music to them. He's produced many pieces throughout the albums in this manner. Now, only once have I read someone else's poem, which was never put on an album, but most writers are drenched in identity and old bankrupt thinking. I discount all art before the end of the nineteenth century as only historical. I disagree with all of their thinking. Why should I want to read their corrupt poems? A poem that is well written but tells lies is not something that would interest me. I do not have enough time or energy to do all of *my own* work, so why would I want to get involved in *somebody else's* work? Do not forget: I am not a rock star, I am primarily a philosopher. For good or bad, I have no hero who has taught me anything about philosophy. I have had to put everything together by myself under great criticism from everybody for my thoughts. Should I read something from Democritus who advanced the cause of atoms around the sixth century B.C.? Is there something to read? I would love to read it or perform it. Do not forget that I have a Bachelor of Arts with a major in History and was half-way through a Masters in Contemporary English Literature, so I am not completely illiterate.

PSF: Related to that, then, you quoted Goethe on *No Borderline* and I would imagine you'd credit Tolstoy as a great author, especially given your background, but who do you see as the worthy modern writers and poets?

COPERNICUS: No one. Unfortunately, we're living in a bad time for telling the truth. Commercialism is King. In the old days, they burned you for telling your truth; today, they ignore you until you give up. I do not give up because being what I am is my only pleasure in life. For me, a new idea and an original way to communicate it is all that I ask for.

PSF: What musical groups appeal to you?

COPERNICUS: None.

PSF: You're most often placed in the progrock bins in record shops, especially in shops lacking avant-garde sections. How does that sit with you and what do you make of that genre?

COPERNICUS: For good or bad, life sent me rock musicians. Copernicus is principally about thought and emotion and really should have

his own category.

PSF: The transglobal music network is an odd one, surprising those who think such things are reserved only for Eric Clapton and Billy Joel. How do independent artists like yourself navigate what seems to be the most threadbare of music's equivalent of silk roads?

COPERNICUS: You give your greatest energy to creating the best that you can do. Then you give your greatest energy and resources to sharing your work with the world. This has been my formula.

PSF: Dave Conrad, at least, was quite the quisling long ago in his 1990 *OPTion* piece regarding the Euro-Russo tour. What did you make of that article and how did the magazine's completely unprofessional lack of editorial discretion strike you?

COPERNICUS: I was very hurt by that article. It had taken me, all by myself, a whole year to organize that incredible tour. It took all the extra money I had, to pay for the tour. Though the musicians were very good on stage throughout it, Larry Kirwan, in some crazy desire to have power, kept the musicians under his control and influenced them to disrespect me at every turn. They would not help me to lift a bag. It was a horror story with them off-stage. The article put the nail in the coffin. Maybe I am no good. I carry that hurt until today.

PSF: How have you viewed the punk "revolution"? Seeing as how it's now nearly dead, the time has come for analysis, rather than the reflexive, regurgitative, commercial worship run in magazines. Was it the anarchy it claimed to be; was it a matter of a bunch of self-indulgent, middle-class, white kids posing as guttersnipes; or was it something in between, perhaps the purgative that even master musicians like Robert Fripp have extolled it to be... or merely the best that could be wrought from a declining culture?

COPERNICUS: All of this analysis of movements is beyond me. I don't even understand what 'punk' means. My job is to grow like a flower in the things I do and not pay too much attention to the other flowers around me, though the day will come when Copernicus' ideas will become a revolution in thought, just as the first Copernicus was a revolution in thought. My work *is* revolution, but it's a little ahead of its time. I hope to leave a full path for humanity in writing and recording.

PSF: I and many place you in a rarified stratum that numbers amongst its occupants The Living Theater. You've informed me that they've indeed *not* expunged themselves from the cultural books. What's your take on the group, their history, and why the disconnect in the needs of our society for critical art?

COPERNICUS: My contact with the Living Theater has been mainly through the artist Iris Lord. She invited Copernicus to perform in some of the concerts that she underwrote and she got Copernicus to underwrite a show at the Living Theater. I know Judith Malina rather well, but I do not know much about the Living Theater. They are building a theater in Manhattan and she travels and performs in Europe.

American society has sold out. American society is like a farmer who is eating his seed to survive for today. American society hates its artists, as all societies in the past have hated their artists. Artists tell the truth. The powers in all societies do not want *the* truth, they want *their* truth, and *their* truth generally benefits only them and their brood to the detriment of everybody else. Therefore, the powers in all societies hate artists. It's a human shame. In the case of Democritus, the powers in society still, 2500 years later, hate what he has to say: that everything is made of atoms in constant motion. This means that nothing exists

PSF: Let's say I'm David Geffen's fictional bastard stepson, if that's even peripherally possible, and that I've come to you to fund your zenith statement because I'm loony and only care for the generation of Art. Cost is no problem; what are you going to create and with whom?

COPERNICUS: I would have all of my albums remixed and re-released with worldwide distribution. I would release an album every six months and promote the album or promote the contents of the thought of the album. I would do concerts and tours according to my own desires. I would make the bastard stepson of David Geffen even richer than he was before he met me for as long as this formula worked with me being in control and not too terrorized. I would do this until I croaked. I'm doing this same formula right now. David Geffen's stepson would just help me to do it at a level where more people could come to understand. The world is sort of letting me go to waste; that is the problem of the world. I am doing my best.

PSF: You remain, besides your mountain-top slice of paradise in Ecuador, in New York. Why?

COPERNICUS: I have several mountaintops. There is no why to a mountaintop. It is.

PART TWO: THE SOUND OF THE MIND

PSF: You were once Roman Catholic, engaged in a Jesuitical quest, and came to the same dead end most of us did. What are your major particular beefs with Christianity or with the clergy, or with both?

COPERNICUS: I did not come to a dead end, I came to Copernicus and the evolution of all of the ideas of Copernicus. This is not a dead end, this is freedom. I'm free of death and of life and even of afterlife. The Catholic Church is just another jerky Mafia organization set up to rob the ignorant poor. Fortunately, it's on its way out. One more generation and the Western world will ask: Catholic who? They have sold 62 churches in the past two years in the Boston Archdiocese, netting 90 million dollars just to pay for all the lawsuits against their child-loving priests. I know the Catholic Church, I know its entire history. They are jerks whose scam is up. I hope when the world comes to the ideas of Copernicus that they do not make a church around those ideas. No physical church is necessary, the Universe is the church, there is no need to have priests because every man and woman is their own priest. Spontaneous communication with all the levels of the Universe is the process.

PSF: If fascism is the marriage of business and the state, what would we call the connubialities of business, state, *and* religion... or is that merely a double redundancy? Has Constantine's child become the alpha and omega?

COPERNICUS: Religion has always been just another business and should not be separated from the word 'business.' Fascism may be the only form of government possible for human beings. Fascism may be the only form of government that has ever existed on the face of the earth and the only form of government ever possible for humans. There is not enough space here to go further on this. Some people

have called me a Fascist. The United States is a fascist state; it certainly is not a democracy. I really do not want to get into politics. I'm a philosopher who cares about pointing out the importance of the atom as it relates to philosophy.

PSF: *Immediate Eternity*, the book, provides a claim unusual in the annals of spiritual literature. You posit physical reality, the atom, as "the source," "God" or whatever we care to call the generative point or the prime-mover-unmoved. Tillich, De Chardin, Pike, and others held a "God beyond God" philosophy as well, which was not met graciously by Mother Church but was nonetheless a zen-ish extension of logical spirituality much in line with some of what Thomas Merton was espousing. Why do you land on physicality as "the Godsource," for lack of any proper term, rather than the unknowable step beyond it, as zen does?

COPERNICUS: The atom is not physical reality, because, according to the definition of Copernicus, for existence, the atom being made up of many smaller particles, all in motion does not exist. The atom does not exist, because the atom itself is subject to the same forces to which a human being is subject. Humanity only understands about 6% of matter, the matter capable of reflecting light. But 94% of the matter of the Universe is still not found or understood. We know that there is something there because of its gravitational effects. *Immediate Eternity* never said that the atom is God. The book stated that if there is a particle that cannot be divided and is not subject to constant change, that particle would *exist*. The word 'God' has so many different definitions and may be best just avoided, because all it does is bring up a debunked, bankrupt, mythical, no-longer-functioning, philosophical past. The unknowable is the foundation for all of the religious scams since Day One. A theory deals with the unknowable in that it puts forth an unproven idea that has a possibility... but just to give up and believe in the unknowable is to ask for the horrendous murder and carnage we've seen in human history.

PSF: Shamans often relied upon so-called hallucinogens for their place in primitive societies. Some continental natives here considered, and often still do, peyote to be a sacrament. Bishop Pike got further from the Church and closer to "God" through LSD, Terence McKenna found enormous psycho-physical benefit and even alien cultures in psychotropic drugs, and Richard Alpert became Ram Dass after both drugs and religion... what do you see in all this drug activity and have such substances figured into your evolution at all, at any point?

COPERNICUS: I'm from the generation that believed that if I had a problem, I should light a cigarette and take a drink like Humphrey Bogart, so that the answers would come to me. Hemingway drank one or two bottles of booze a day. I wanted to be a writer and so I drank alcohol sometimes to excess. I used to even drink alcohol on stage. My generation was only alcohol and cigarettes. However, I watched a video of a show I did with twelve great musicians behind me and my conclusion was "Copernicus is drunk." I had not too long before gone head first off a six feet high stage and, incredibly, landed on my feet. The people applauded because they thought it was part of the performance but it wasn't. I had taken four shots of whiskey before I got on stage and didn't even know where I was. I also used to go out for days, for a period of about ten years, in these after-hours places in Harlem, drinking, sniffing cocaine, and writing poetry.

In analyzing all of this use of drugs, I have come to the conclusion that, for performing, it takes away your mind and makes your body weak; for writing, it disorients the writing; and, in both cases, performance and writing, drugs were a hindrance to what I was trying to do. My mother said that I could have gone much farther if I didn't drink. She could be wrong, she could be right. In some cases, in the beginning of imbibing, it's possible that ideas came to me that might not have come to me without the booze.

Anyway, *Immediate Eternity* was written with no booze, just Ecuatorian coffee and cigarettes. Maybe I should rewrite it after drinking a bottle of booze and see what comes out. It will be worse. *Immediate Eternity* took me three years to write, taxing physically and intellectually. A drunk could not have written that book...though all of the first five albums were recorded spontaneously under the influence of Seagrams Seven, a cheap Canadian whiskey. Just listen to "Rah!" on *Null* and imagine a sober person doing that.

Both albums of *Immediate Eternity*, in the four languages in which it is recorded, were done with no alcohol. Today, I feel sorry for people who use any drug to attempt great work.

PSF: Many of the so-called modern masters turned incredibly corrupt (Rajneesh), bizarre (Mahesh Yogi), alcoholic (Trungpa), or engaged in shenanigans not very ethical (Maezumi Roshi, etc.) - and then, of course, there's Scientology. Is this a result of the lamentable condition of being an enlightened soul within pitifully shallow cultures, or does it reveal flaws in the various disciplines themselves?

COPERNICUS: Artists and philosophers should learn one thing: they should not expect that their art or their philosophy should produce money. If they need money, they should get purely involved in making money and not mix money with their art or their philosophy. Therein lies the defect of the examples you have given. They needed money and therefore called on their art or philosophy to produce money. Wrong! Money corrupts. Selling art or philosophy for money corrupts the art and the philosophy.

My studies in history showed me that and had a great influence on my activities. I saw three roads regarding art: the first was the road of the artist with a patron, like Michaelangelo and the Medici; the second was the starving artist like Van Gogh; but, for me, there was a third road: born poor in the richest country on earth, you could make your own money, and then allow your art to be free of the corruption of it. Thus Copernicus is producing his own albums and publishing his own book.

Philosophies that involve ego are defective. Ego is as corrupting as money. Ego can be done away with through wise information. Money's just another tool that one must learn to use wisely. You shouldn't use a circular saw to clean your nails.

PSF: Some find dogma to be acceptable, others go beyond and synthesize the most logical components from everything available into a more useful vehicle, while still others have seemingly cut through the bullshit and come to a very simple expanded existentialist ideation: we exist and that's that - we live, we die, we live, we die, we live, we die... ad infinitum, nothing more, nothing less. Is this nihilism or realism and do you see the Wheel of death and rebirth as consequential, inevitable, or illusion?

COPERNICUS: Illusion. There is no such thing as life or death or rebirth. These concepts are mental traps created by people who need to define reality with their bare senses. Reality is beyond the perceptions of the human senses. This is one of the major themes of Copernicus, because it is very difficult to go beyond the human senses... but if I could do it, anybody could do it.

PSF: Your book is profoundly street-level despite its subject matter and that seems to be exactly the point: no one has to be anything special, they just need to see. There's a new kid on the block, Adyashanti, and, though he seems overtly fey in his disposition, the message he's carrying is much the same: anyone can achieve peace and enlightenment in his lifetime. This somewhat harks back to the days of Ikkyu, the third patriarch of zen, who attacked his own religion as the first act of liberation from maya. Realistically, are we finally seeing the first step of the end of religion?

COPERNICUS: Firstly, achieving peace is never a good thing. Achieve struggle. When you stop struggling, you stop growing. It seems to me that peace causes struggling, and thus growing, to cease. All you want is evolution, not so much enlightenment, because enlightenment involves something like a visitation by an angel. Be patient, evolve slowly or quickly, however it comes, but do not expect great enlightenments through singular events. However, once or twice in a lifetime, singular events upon an open-minded individual can cause a great enlightenment. Wisdom and truth are all around us, we just have to be able to find them. Normally, we inch forward very slowly, but every little inch is a great treasure. You will be the only judge about the value of this. Be positive and do your best.

Everyone can struggle to evolve. Some, for whatever reason, can go deeper in understanding than others. Please forget about peace and do not definitely search for peace. If you ever find peace, run from it to where there is authentic struggle. Peace will make you pacified like a dead fish on the beach.

Religions come and go. That has been the story of religion. What happened to the great Egyptian religion which provided the seminal ideas of Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism? Christianity and Mohammedanism became widespread only through the use of violence. Give me the American Army and I'll soon have everybody believing that they do not exist.

The definition of religion that I remember is: "the summation of man's relationship with God." Man seems to need that relationship; that's why man created God. That creation, however, may have caused man a lot of trouble. Once man created God, his neighbor created another God, and then *his* neighbor created his God, and etc., until we have many many Gods. Now, which God is the best or the true God? That will always be determined on the field of battle. If I beat you on the field of battle, that means my God is better than your God.

For good or bad, religion will always be with us. What we do *not* want always to be with us are these people who claim that their religion is absolutely true and that all other religions are absolutely false. Everybody has to recognize that their religious ideas could be wrong, that their religious thoughts are being followed by them because that's the best they can do, but there's a chance they may be wrong. Those who claim to be absolutely right have given themselves the right to be killers of everybody else.

PSF: How do we compose societies after religions have gone the way of the dodo? Will, as Bertrand Russell avers, logic and reason suffice?

COPERNICUS: You compose societies with logic, reason, law, and an absolutely just enforcement of law. As I said, religions will never go the way of the dodo. They just change names and sometimes, superficially, thoughts. The ideas of Copernicus contain the fundamentals for a new religion. The beauty of Copernicus' religion is that you do not need priests, churches, or money, although somebody will probably figure out a way to make money from the Universe.

PSF: One passage of yours: "Be careful of the world of rejection that cries alone in the desperation of no song that bleeds in the night into the torn rag of tears that brings poems into the world..." (p. 71) describes about half of all art ever produced. Are you proclaiming an end to all that?

COPERNICUS: Artists who are recognized during their lifetimes are generally mediocrities. Probably, the greatest art ever produced is totally unknown.

PSF: Your concepts of MAGOVA, BEJ, and MAH, when read against an informed background, create a physicalist analogue corresponding incompletely to the classical treatises. They say that the phenomenological world, no matter how well presented nor how minutely inspected, is never the be-all and end-all. Your philosophy, however, seems to be antithetical to that, as, in descriptions of places, from Illusiona to MAGOVA to BEJ, you're speaking of places and things (MAH). By use of those terms alone, physicality is inferred. This is where many people lose the string. The Buddha and others spoke of nullity, the void, as a place that was not a place. Are we encountering linguistic/perceptual problems here, or are you firmly stating that physicality is the final, indivisible, inescapable reality?

COPERNICUS: First, I do not believe that *Immediate Eternity* attempts, as one of its goals, to define reality. It is basically a book of observations aspiring to define reality but recognizing there is still a lack of information. The difference between Buddha and Copernicus is that Buddha allowed for ego and individuality and Copernicus states that nothing exists including the ego and individuality. I'm firmly stating that there are very small never-detected particles out there, filled with eternal energy that are racing around at the speed of light, joining and disjoining with stuff. The stuff that seems to be created is filled with these never-detected particles of energy that are not permitting anything to exist... *if* existence is defined as being able to stay the same from one moment to the next.

My job, and it is stated somewhere in the book, is to make human beings aware that they do not exist. Defining reality is another task which I may or may not someday be competent to enter into. If you're asking if I believe in the Holy Ghost, I would tell you that anything is possible, but right now the knowledge that I do not exist, can never die, and therefore cannot be sent to Hell is a liberatingly good feeling. I may be wrong, but this is what I see. Doesn't this idea also liberate the rest of humanity from fear?

Reality is inescapable. We are reality. We are God. We are reality. We are the Universe. We are the multiverse. We are indivisible because we are *not*. We are not and there is nothing that is final; everything is immediate eternity. Enjoy the paradise and liberation from ignorant human traps.

PSF: Your contention on page 33 is interesting: that Christians or ex-Christians, though equally based in myth, may well be the creators of the new millennial realities, while Jews and Mohammedans are yet "incarcerated" in their myths. I'd like to argue this for a moment. All three are Abrahamic desert religions, with everything that implies. Islam created the fount of Western civilization and was crushed as a competitive threat to its own abstracted estranged progeny, Christianity. To that time, it, though, contained the most tolerant and enlightened sector of the West and Near East. That the land now seems to reflect the fundamentalist regressions that so typified earlier Christianity is regrettable, but why do you see the Christian mindset as sufficiently progressive to do as you claim? I see little evidence of it except in those I cited earlier, all now long fallen into obscurity, with the possible exception of contemporary gents like Shelby Sping.

COPERNICUS: It may very well be that Christianity in the Western world will collapse of its own weight well before Mohammedanism or Judaism. Christianity is rapidly collapsing. I recognized that in 1961, in Europe. Europe is now lost. This is spreading rapidly in the United States. We have local parishes suing the Vatican for theft (see the Wall Street Journal, Dec. 20, 2005). What will all those lost Christians be doing? Some will become Mohammedans; others will become Jews; others will become Buddhists, etc..

However, a good number will turn to science and, out of the discoveries of science, will form a basis for visionaries who will interpret modern scientific discoveries from the point of view of human philosophy. They will make records and write books documenting their interpretations. They will provide humanity enough philosophy so that humanity does not commit suicide until its capacity is up to the level where it will be able to travel space and find civilizations on other planets...then, in the end, stop war on Planet Earth in order go to war against the new planet. No doubt.

The smartest, best prepared, and most liberated minds of the planet will be ex-Christians reaching into the microcosm and macrocosm, trying to explain it all with the vestiges of their Christianity within them. They will want to share what they've found with everybody, whether everybody likes it or not. The promotion of new ideas is a difficult, expensive, and dangerous proposition. However, it will happen. The future of nonexistent humanity lies in the heavens, not in heaven.

PSF: Given that most of the minds on this backwater mudball will not be able to comprehend what you're saying otherwise, perhaps your "humanity... is within the power of humanity," on page 97, is one of the best reminders since George Bernard Shaw's admonition that "the religion of man should be mankind." However, given the unbelievable venality of the Bush Crime Syndicate and the society's stultifyingly passive mien in the face of it, all engendered by a secret desire to share in the spoils of corruption, is there really a prayer?

COPERNICUS: The religion of man should be *of* the truth, not *in* man. Are you forgetting about all of our brother creatures on the earth? Hope for a better world must always be maintained, intelligent hope should never be abandoned. The lot of humanity has gotten better since when I was younger - certainly not the lot for our brother animals, though. There is prayer and there's nothing wrong in praying, just do not demand. Pray, hope for the best, and do the best that you can.

PSF: Your relation of Father Tom's inadvertant confession of solipsism revealed, I think, what's at the bottom of almost all religions, save the most basic Far Eastern philosophies (Buddhism, Zen, Ch'an, Taoism, etc.): overwhelming fear in the face of unimaginable forces and the resulting propitiation of factors we cannot locate. Everything we see indicates an inimical base to reality, yet you and others say that it's not so, that we're inflowing mistaken data. Being an anarchist, I could care less and take a taoist's viewpoint: what happens happens, but I don't discount inquiry into mechanics at all and would like to see an eventual global sanity emerge from that quest. The Dalai Lama agrees in this meta-scientific grail yet you are in agreement that we need only wake up. However, those who have awoken plainly are human, do not answer the myth of the *uberman*, and put their pants on one leg at a time. There's a weird dichotomy there- it jars our Carlylian goals. Is the aspiration to physical utopianism a mistake?

COPERNICUS: Aspiration to physical utopianism? Just be what you are, try to know and understand what you are, and act based on what you think. Respect your actions at every moment. Don't betray yourself. Never be your own worst enemy. Do not aspire to unknown ideals, just be the expression of what you are now. Life is great even though you do not exist. The foundation of fear is ignorance. If you are afraid, it is a signal, like pain, that you need to clean up some ignorance causing the fear. If you don't exist and cannot die, what is there to fear? The unimaginable forces are with us just as long as they are being respected. When ego enters and man separates himself, through the ignorance of ego, from the unimaginable forces, going to war against the them, he will lose and create a Hell for himself. We are part of the unimaginable forces. They are not separate from us or out there to do us harm. We are them. They are us. Understand that, feel that, believe that, feed off that, be inspired by that, and wake up everyday loving that. The forces will give you strength to reach inside of yourself and do your best. You are an unimaginable force the moment that you give up your ego and let your mind join the force, becoming immediately eternal.

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